No. 13

No 115

An Inaugural Dissertation
on
Amenorrhoea
By
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On amenorrhoea.

Before proceeding to the consideration of this disease, it will be proper to take a cursory view of the nature of menstruation; as it will not only enable us better to understand its nature, but also, facilitate our enquiries into its causes, and thereby aid us in prescribing for its cure.

Various are the hypotheses which have been promulgated, as explanatory of the causes and nature of this function. It has been absurdly attributed to lunar influence, as having some analogy to the tides; to the operation of a ferment generated in the uterus, or some humour in the blood; and to general, as well as local plethora. But as it would be unnecessary and superfluous to reiterate here, the arguments subversive of these visionary notions, I have only mentioned them as illusions of the imagination, which have once

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The only theory which seems at all consonant with facts, or derives any support by analogy from the general laws of the animal economy, is that which maintains the menses to be the product of a secretory action of the uterus, excited by an influence derived from the ovaries. This stimulus causes a flow of blood into the tortuous vessels of this organ, and thus obeys every requisition to the process of secretion. And hence, the idea of a local congestion is very intelligible and just, being what is observed with regard to every gland in the body. The menstrual fluid is not therefore, as was formerly supposed, an effusion of blood; but a sanguineous secretion, — deficient in fibrin, and in other respects, differs materially from blood. And upon

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this ground it is to be presumed, that all uterine discharges, possessing coagulability, is referable to some other cause.
As it would be an injudicious expenditure of time, to take even a summary view of the arguments which have been so successfully advanced in supporting and establishing this theory, both on this account, and to avoid interpolating these lines with matter foreign to our design, we shall, thus concisely noticed dismiss this part of our subject.
It is obvious from what has been said, that this is an anomalous secretion, both as regards its periodical recurrence, and the nature of the discharge itself. The secretion of milk is somewhat analogous in the former respect, and is farther allied, in the relation of the cause, determining the action of each.
Contemplated in the view above taken, it

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is evident, that amenorrhoea consists in a morbid suspension, or suppression of the secretory action of the uterus; and the modus operandi of remedies calculated to remove it, is by restoring the organ to that condition, on which its healthy functions depend. To do this, it will be necessary duly to appreciate any concomitant affection of the whole or part of the system, which may exercise an influence in causing and continuing the disease

No one condition of the system has greater controul over health, is attended with such extreme solicitude and distress, or more impairs the strength of the constitution, than that of amenorrhoea; circumstances which, together with its frequent occurence, combine to render a knowledge of it exceedingly im-

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portant to every one exercising the profession of medicine.

Amenorrhoea is to be considered as of two kinds: the one being, when the catamenia fail to appear at the period of life at which they are commonly expected; and the other, where, after having made their appearance for some time, they do not from some other cause than conception, continue to return at their usual periods. The former of these is denominated retention or emansio mensium, and the latter, suppression, of the menses.

The menses may, from causes retarding the arrival at puberty so early as is usual, be later appearing in some, than in others. But this is not to be considered disease, or an object of our attention, unless with their absence is associated those morbid affections, which are known characteristics of the complaint. These disorders are, a sluggishness and listlessness to motion;

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great fatigue on the least exercise; a frequent sense of lassitude and debility; palpitations at the heart; transient pains occuring in the back, loins and hips: flatulency; acidities in the prima via; with various other symptoms of dyspepsia; as a preternatural propensity to eat chalk, clay, lime cinders &c. Progressively, we mark the following symptoms: the face becomes pale and flabby, and afterwards assumes a yellowish or greenish hue, from which circumstance, the disease has obtained the name of Chlorosis; the lips lose their vermilion colour; the eyes become encircled with a dark areola; the whole body is pale and flaccid; and the depending parts take on an oedematous disposition. The person is now affected with various hysterical symptoms as dyspnoea, globus hystericus &c: there is an increased mobility of the vital organs, the respiration being much hurried by active

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employment, and the pulse is irritated and small; and not unfrequently hectic fever supervenes. These symptoms manifest every consequence of debility, and accordingly, the retention of the menses has been generally attributed to this cause, which in many cases is undoubtedly true; But on a former occasion it has been observed that the ovaries exercise a controul over the uterus, causing the menstrual action; if then, these bodies cease to extend their influence, from the variety of diseases to which they are subject, a suspension of the menses is uniformly a consequence; and in many cases, I presume it is only by reference to this fact, that we are to look for the primary cause. This was the opinion of Cullen: he moreover believed "that in females, a certain state of the genitals is necessary to give tone and tension to the whole system; and therefore, that if the stimulus arising from the

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genitals be wanting, the whole system may fall into a torpid and flaccid state, and from thence chlorosis and retention of the menses may arise". How far this is correct, it would be difficult to determine; yet it appears to carry with it, a considerable degree of plausibility. —

From what has been said of the general character of this disease, whether the debility be regarded as the cause, or effect of retention, or as a concomitant effect of the same cause, the plan of treatment most successful, obviously consists in those measures calculated to restore tone to the whole system, and of such as expend their influence more immediately in exciting the uterine action. The first of these is to be accomplished, by exercise graduated to the strength of the patient, — on no occasion extending it to fa-

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tigue; such as dancing, riding on horse-back, or swinging, is to be prefered; by a nutritive diet with a proper proportion of wine; by cold bathing, or if this be productive of unpleasant effects, the daily use of the warm saltwater-bath, succeeded by frections with flannel; by keeping the patient warm and comfortably clad, and the mind cheerfully engaged and tranquil. At the same time tonic medicines are to be regularly employed; and of these, the chalybeates have been long celebrated as the most powerful and effectual. But of the great variety of forms of this medicine, the rubigo ferri, as embracing the properties of the whole, may supercede in use, all of the rest. It may be given in the dose of ten or fifteen grains frequently repeated; or if the stomach be much

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debilitated, the wine made of the carbonate with the addition of orange peel and gentian, may answer better. A trial however, may be made with other preparations; and when the disease assumes a phthisical shape, with hectic fever no medicine answers the indication better than a combination of the sulphate of iron, aloes, myrrh and the fixed alkalies. Cinchona, quassia, gentian and other tonics may be employed, and in many cases, are extremely useful. But previous to the adoption of these measures, it is generally necessary to evacuate the alimentary canal by gentle vomiting and the use of laxative medicines. Nor is the utility of this practice limited to the commencement of this disease. Exhibited in the subsequent stages, emetics by exciting a strong impres

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ion in the stomach, the uterus as well as the whole system is made to feel their influence, by which the chain of morbid associations is broken, and healthy action more readily established. If retention of the menses be connected with a plethoric state of the system, it is necessary in the first instance, to reduce it by a mild and spare diet, the use of purgative medicines, and if there be much excitement, by venesection. Regular exercise in this view, is of benefit; but in all cases, fatigue is productive of pernicious consequences.

Much has been said of the different mineral waters in this complaint; but considering the minute quantity of active ingredients which they contain, they would appear if not altogether a nugatory, at best a very inefficient resource. It

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is not to be denied however, that the circumstances attending their use, as a change of air, cheerful society and renovating exercise, are often productive of the happiest effects. Should acidity in the stomach and bowels prevail, it is to be corrected by the cretaceous mixture, magnesia, or potash

The second intention of cure (viz of exciting the uterine action,) is to be effected by such exercise as determine more immediately, the flow of blood to the uterus and neighbouring parts; as walking, dancing, jumping the rope and riding on horseback. To these should be added, frictions frequently repeated; the application of a blister to the sacrum, or inside of the thighs as high as practicable; and by heat applied to the lower part of the abdomen and the pudenda in the form either of steam, or the semicupium as warm as can be borne. With the same view, the

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interposition of active cathartics, is of the highest utility. Those usually selected, are aloes, gamboge, and scammony; but the preparations of the first, ~~from~~ possessing a peculiar affinity in their operation to the large intestines, which are situated in the vicinity of the uterus, are generally prefered. ~~their superior efficacy is well known~~. The use of the most active of these remedies, should be generally suspended for two or three weeks in the interval, so that their operation may concur with the menstrual effort, expected to be made on the fourth. Marriage, has also been recommended, and is certainly one of the most effectual means of exciting the uterus to the performance of its natural and healthy functions. But as has been justly remarked, "it does not suit every virgin to enter into the married state". We cannot

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therefore, always avail ourselves of its aid; but must have recourse to other remedies, though less effectual, yet more valuable, as they admit of more general application. — As constipation generally accompanies this disease, communicating a similar torpor to the rest of the system, an assiduous attention is as constantly demanded, to promote free and regular alvine discharges; And it is sufficiently probable, that some of those direful effects consequent to this complaint, — (nature being defective,) may be entirely obviated by thus creating and establishing an artificial evacuation: And for this purpose, the compound rhubarb pill, combinations of aloes, iron and myrrh, or aloes and calomel, are the best adapted.

As retention of the menses almost always appears as a symptomatic affection, and therefore, only to be removed by curing the

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primary disorder, I see no clear indication which emmenagogues are calculated to fulfill. If however a case should occur in which the uterus seems originally affected, and essential to its continuance, they may be usefully employed. But, ~~as~~ being infinitely better suited to cases of suppression, I shall decline any other remark on their use until treating of that division, now to be spoken of.

Suppression of the menses is subdivided into checked, and obstructed; the former is when, by the interference of those causes which produce it, the discharge is suddenly stopped in the time of the flow; and the latter, when the menses are prevented from returning at their usual periods by the intervention of causes during the interval.

In general, whatever communicates an immediate and powerful impulse to

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system, may check menstruation. Hence, sudden exposure to cold, especially when united with moisture, fear, and violent passions of the mind, are the most prolific sources of this effect. It is supposed they operate by inducing spasmodic constriction of the extreme vessels of the uterus; and the symptoms which succeed, as acute uterine and colic pain, hysterical affections, and symptomatic fever, are occasioned by the spasm, and resistance to the accumulated fluids. The plan of treatment most effectual in relieving these violent symptoms, consists chiefly, in the free use of relaxing and antispasmodic measures. Of these, the semicupium, opium in large doses, with ipecac in sufficient quantity to nauseate, venesection proportioned to the degree of fever, and saline cathartics, are the most important. If the agonies of the patient be excruciating, an anodyne

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enema affords great relief; and embrocations over the abdomen with the anodyne liniment, may also be employed. Castor, in very large doses, in such cases is chiefly relied on by some, and by them has received the highest commendations. — It sometimes happens that the uterus or general health is so much injured, that the catamenia do not return in several months, in which case we must proceed in the manner afterwards to be mentioned.

Obstruction of the menses may occur either as symptomatic of some other affection of the constitution; or as an original disease. As applying to the first, it is to be regarded as always a natural consequence of pregnancy; and is here associated with effects soon manifested and so unequivocal, as not to be mistaken. The most common symptomatic obstruction demanding our attention, as disease, is that caused by debility,

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induced, perhaps, by excessive evacuations, a penurious diet, frequent fatigue, or in short, whatever tends greatly to weaken the patient. In this case, the effect is frequently misapprehended for the cause; but it is of the utmost importance to discriminate the relationship of such a connection, as the use of medicines which would be otherwise prescribed, might be productive of exceedingly mischevious and pernicious consequences; and in general this may be done with great facility, by enquiring into the history of the case. Occuring in this enfeebled condition of the system, and considered merely as an effect thereof, the same indications present themselves ~~as~~ in obstruction, as in retention of the menses. We are to proceed in the same way to fulfill them, and it is therefore superfluous to recapitulate the remedies. I shall only observe in the present place, that if it should occur as a consequence of some chronic and ob-

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stinate disease, as consumption or dropsy, it would be both useless and hurtful to attempt a restoration of the catamenia by the ordinary remedies. An imbecility of the uterus itself, as occasioned by frequent abortions or excess in venery, may so incapacitate it, as to be no longer in that state, able to perform its healthy functions; and a condition similar to this, is, when the discharge in leucorrhoea proceeds from the glandular apparatus of the uterus, injuring the tone of the organ so much as to interfere with menstruation, sometimes stopping it altogether. — But what I imagine to be a more frequent cause, is that perverted secretory action of the uterus, by which an extraneous organised, and membranous substance is produced. Nothing seems to be clearly ascertained, relative

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to the cause of this production, or the process by which it is fabricated. It has been attributed to exacerbations of venereal desire, which are supposed to excite in the uterus an action similar to that which takes place at the time of conception. This, although an ingenious hypothesis, is not without its objections; and for the present we must acknowledge ourselves ignorant of its cause, and content ourselves with knowing that it must in some way or other be formed by those vessels which are appropriated to the secretion of the menstrual fluid; and that the actions necessary to the formation of the two, are wholy incompatible. — The effects of suppression of the menses are much modified and influenced by the previous condition of the system, and especially, with regard to individual organs, in which, if there be a predisposition, it seldom continues long without exciting them into

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morbid action; and in this respect, the liver, spleen and lungs, are most frequently implicated. Various affections of particular parts also, are not unusually occasioned, which manifest a determination of blood into them, perhaps, by the blood with which the uterus should have been supplied, being invited to such parts by a sympathetic action. Hence, hemorrhages from the lungs, nose, stomach and many other parts have been vicarious to suppression of the menses.

In a curative point of view, we are in all forms of amenorrhoea to consider their respective causes, and adapt our remedies accordingly. In those cases having their origin in atony of the uterus, the menses may in general, be easily restored by proper means. The removal of the cause, & the use of emmenagogues is in many instances sufficient to accomplish a cure. The emmenagogues here most useful are the savin, balsam. Copaiva, oil of turpentine and tinct. of cantharides.

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which have been severally employed with conspicuous advantage. If the case have been occasioned by leucorrhoea and is of long standing, it will be of more doubtful termination.

If there be a case of obstruction supposed to consist in a constriction affecting the extreme vessels of the uterus, the management is materially the same with that in checked menstruation: warm bathing, bloodleting and vomiting skillfully directed should be employed; and if this prove ineffectual, recourse should be had to those remedies prescribed in cases of retention, for the purpose of determining the circulation to the uterus.

If amenorrhoea be complicated with hepatic affections, the use of mercury becomes essentially necessary; and if pyrexia attend, small & repeated bleedings must also be practiced.

Amenorrhoea in its different forms, is often accompanied with symptoms similar

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to pulmonary consumption, in which case it will be of the highest utility occasionally to administer an emetic, and such medicines as keep the bowels in a soluble condition; but purging to any extent, is hurtful. As expectorants in this case, the preparations of seneka, squill and ammoniac, are to be preferred. The diet should be light and nutritive. If the ~~the~~ ~~[illegible]~~ patients circumstances will justify it, a removal to a warmer climate, and moderate exercise on horseback, will contribute greatly to a recovery.

Of the various forms of Amenorrhoea, probably the most distressing to the patient, and embarasing to the practitioner, is that occasioned by the membrana decidua. Its formation is denoted at first, by a slight irregularity of menstruation, which is afterwards attended with great pain and dis

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ficulty, and the flow is slow and defi-
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succeeds, with the train of ill consequen-
ces before enumerated.

With the circumstances before us, connec-
ed with the formation of this membrane,
the plan of cure is obviously to change
the state of the uterus, and excite a spe-
cific impression, subversive of the exist-
ing one. To accomplish this, is an arduous
undertaking; and he who attempts it must
be prepared for disappointment.

It is in this, as well as in all other cases,
of primary importance, properly to reg-
ulate the general system, equally avoid-
ing too great excitement or debility, by
the employment of appropriate remedies.
Most frequently it is associated with ex-
cessive action; and where this is the case,
venesection is indispensible; and pur-
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+ Sometimes excreted in Dysmenorrhoea

must be carried to the necessary extent. The system being thus prepared, the medicine which claims priority to our attention, is the polygala senega. Judiciously directed, it may be advantageously employed in the all the forms of this disease; but especially, displays superior powers, where it is dependent on the decidua, by Membrane acting as a powerful stimulant on the whole system, and determined with peculiar force to the uterus, it there excites a powerful secretory action, by which means the membrane is disengaged. The mode of prescribing it, is in the form of strong decoction, of which, four ounces are to be taken in the day, increasing it when the menstrual effort is expected, as much as the stomach will allow. Aromatics are added, if it excite nausea; and it is omitted for two or three weeks in the interval, to prevent disgust. For the purpose of

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expelling this membrane, the volatile tinct. of guaiac has by some been employed with reputed success; but it has generally in the hands of others disappointed their expectations. The secale cornutum, from its powerful expulsatory operation on the uterus, would not appear destitute of high pretensions in this case; but its effects are too evanescent to promise much. It has however been sometimes successful in bringing away the membrane. To mitigate the violence of pain, so constantly accompanying the formation of this membrane, the lancet must be employed if fever attend; and the warm bath, ~~with~~ or local fomentations are highly serviceable. But our main dependence, is on the free use of opium and camphor; and if the emergency of the case demand it, an anodyne enema should be administered.

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times have the mortification to find cases of this disease, obstinately to resist, and paralise the usual measures adopted for its cure. Under such circumstances, if no symptoms present forbid it, by the use of mercury to the extent of a gentle ptyalism, continued for a week or two, we shall sometimes succeed in curing it.

Thus, by assiduously watching the precise condition of the system, and apply our remedies accordingly, we shall seldom fail in the management of the different forms of amenorrhoea.